STAR WARS

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Calgary metro

Your essential daily news | MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2015 | High -4°C/Low -9°C Mostly sunny

METRO READERS SAY

GET VACCINATED

metroVIEWS

HEAVY HITTER

Light Heavyweight Petru Bolun makes Canadian national team — bound for Olympic trials. Coverage, metroNEWS

BRODIE THOMAS/METRO

City traffic tickets dip, say police

INFRACTIONS

Photo radar numbers up because of units on the road

Lucie Edwardson
Metro | Calgary

Although numbers appear to be trending upwards, Calgary Police say traffic tickets are actually improving in the city.

Staff Sgt. Paul Stacey said automated enforcement, which includes photo radar, red light cameras and speed on green is up 21 per cent total. But Stacey said if you take a closer look, we're beginning to see downward trends.

"If you break that down, our red light infractions are down almost 6 per cent over this time last year, and our speed on green is down almost 18 per cent from this time last year," he said.

Stacey said the one area that has really increased is photo radar. "Photo radar is up 51 per cent," he said. "But that's because we have four more units on the road. So where we used to have six units on the road, we now have 10."

According to Stacey, these numbers shouldn't alarm. He said there are valid reasons for the increase.

"There's now officially more than 1 million vehicles registered in Calgary alone," he said. "That's a decent increase over 2014 and we've also seen a population increase....When you look at the amount of driving that goes on in the city, relatively speaking, the numbers are low."

For more, see page 5

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metro NEWS

Your essential daily news

Tears, love and family greet newly arrived Syrian refugees in Montreal. **Canada**

CHARITY

Donor buys house for kids with rare illness

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

This spring, 11-year-old Kadence and eight-year-old Addison were diagnosed with Friedreich's Ataxia — a neuromuscular disorder that will slowly take away their ability to walk, run and play without a wheelchair.

Shanna Leavitt, single mother to the two girls, was devastated to learn both her daughters had the incredibly rare disease — and was unsure how she was going to renovate their two-storey home to accommodate.

Last week, her sisters and friends invited her over for brunch and presented her with a video — which told her story, then revealed an anonymous donor had bought her a house and would pay the mortgage until she sold her current house and could move in. An Airdrie contractor also stepped up to help renovate the new bungalow for the girls.

"It's been overwhelming. My friends laugh at me because I'm speechless, and I'm never speechless," said Leavitt.

"One of the biggest concerns for me right now is my youngest daughter. She's progressing quite quickly, and it's been difficult here in the home with her getting up and down the stairs.

"It's such an amazing and generous gift that we were given."

To learn more or donate to the family, visit ampossible.org.

Monterey Park shooting hits 'too close to home'

CRIME

Man gunned down in broad daylight in the city's northeast

Jeremy Simes
For Metro | Calgary

Two children were playing in their backyard Sunday afternoon when six gunshots rang out just feet away in an alleyway that hugs their home.

"There could have been stray bullets," said the kids' mom, who only wanted to be identified by her first initial, E.

She was celebrating her birthday with the family.

"It startled them," she said. "They thought they were firecrackers."

A man was gunned down in the community of Monterey Park mid-Sunday afternoon.

At approximately 2:23 p.m., police were called to the northeast community after hearing reports of a shooting.

A body — covered by lime-green tarp — could be seen next to a red Honda in the alleyway.

Several officers were on scene, talking with neighbours about what they had heard and seen.

E's kids were recording a video as the bullets flew. She said officers obtained the video as evidence into their investigation, after they spoke to the children.

"This is way too close to home," she said.

Another neighbour — a man who lives next door to E — said he awoke to several gunshot noises that echoed in his home.

"I heard some sound(s) of the shooting, then my son told me someone is in the back alley lying on the ground," said the man, who wished to remain anonymous. "I just saw one person there."

> **"I heard some sound(s) of the shooting, then my son told me someone is in the back alley lying on the ground.**
> Monterey Park resident

He said he called the police right away.

"I said I heard gunshots and that someone was in the back alley," he said. "They told me to stay in the house."

He said he felt scared.

"Bullets can cross (the fence)," he said.

This is the second shooting in the area within four months.

On Aug. 22, David Quach, 27, was gunned down in his car on the 7000 block of California Boulevard N.E. He had been previously arrested for drug charges.

The investigation is ongoing for the Sunday shooting, and more details will be released when they become available, police said.

Police contained the crime scene in a Monterey Park alleyway Sunday afternoon. Neighbors heard the gunshots and called police. JEREMY SIMES/FOR METRO

Family welcomes naloxone change

OVERDOSES

Looser rules allow greater usage of life-saving drug

Jeremy Simes
For Metro | Calgary

Ashley Zamko wonders if a dose of naloxone could have saved her sister's life.

Zamko's sister, Jaidyn, died in August from the notorious synthetic drug fentanyl, and, according to Ashley, paramedics didn't have the potentially life-saving antidote on hand.

"I'm not sure if it would've saved her life," Ashley said. "But it would've been that extra chance she could've had."

Ashley's comments come on the heels of a recent order by Health Minister Sarah Hoffman.

Announced Friday, the government loosened regulations to let medical professionals administer and prescribe naloxone, the drug used to prevent fentanyl overdoses.

Ashley said she knows of someone who was saved by naloxone.

"They did have it with them and were injected," she said. "I feel like if they didn't have it (administered), they would've passed away."

Registered nurses — who already administer and distribute naloxone — will now be able to prescribe the opioid blocker.

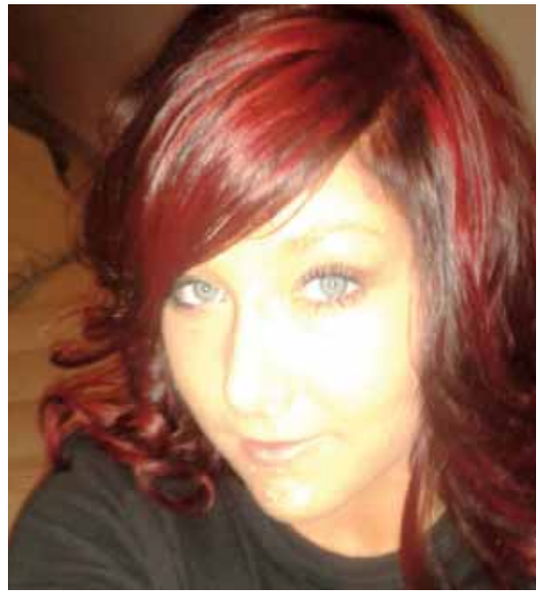
Paramedics, who could previously only distribute naloxone, can now administer the drug.

"Too many Albertans' lives have been cut short by fentanyl, and too many Alberta families have experienced the devastating loss of a loved one due to an accidental overdose," Hoffman said in a press release.

Jaidyn — who would be turning 22 this month — struggled with addiction, but was on track to get clean, Ashley said.

She swore she knew the difference between fentanyl pills and other opiates, telling her family she'd be careful.

Ashley said Jaidyn must have taken the pill by mistake — something many do.



Fentanyl claimed Jaidyn Zamko's life early August. CONTRIBUTED

The drug normally comes in tablet form, but can be hidden in other drugs, like OxyContin and laced cocaine.

"It's sad how many people we're losing to this drug," she said. "If this (government order) means for the chance an extra life could be saved, then they should carry (naloxone) with them."

> **"it would've been that extra chance she could've had."**
> Ashley Zamko

Tim Essington, registrar with the Alberta College of Paramedics, said the organization is pleased with Alberta Health's orders.

"Paramedics, EMTs and EMRs are often the first on scene to treat those who have overdosed on fentanyl or other drugs," Essington said.

"The Alberta College of Paramedics is pleased that the Alberta government has authorized our highly skilled emergency responders to use naloxone as a tool to respond more effectively when a patient has overdosed."

Last year, 120 Albertans died after taking fentanyl. From Jan. 1 to Sept. 30 of this year, there were 213 deaths related to the drug.

The government's changes will be in effect until July 1, 2016 and can be renewed if necessary.

IN BRIEF

Police seek suspect in three robberies

Calgary police are looking to identify an armed robber suspected of hitting two northwest liquor stores and a Subway within two days.

The suspect is described as black or dark-skinned, between 25 to 30 years old, about six feet tall, with a medium build and a shaved head. He was wearing a grey tuque, a dark green or grey jacket with a logo and a patterned black (or blue) and white scarf over half his face, black jeans and black shoes. METRO

Rollover leaves man dead

A man is dead and a woman is critically injured following a single vehicle crash on Highway 2 Saturday at about 5 p.m. near Standoff. The SUV was travelling south when it lost control on a bend and rolled into a nearby field.

A 37-year-old man was pronounced dead in hospital. A 30-year-old woman remains in critical condition.

Speed and alcohol are believed to have played roles in this collision. METRO

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BY THE NUMBERS

Red light, green light

Calgary's intersection cameras are used by city police to promote traffic safety. Here are some important figures you should consider — especially if you tend to drive with a heavy foot. LUCIE EDWARDSON METRO

51

Number of intersection cameras in Calgary

0.5%

Vehicles travelling through those intersections ticketed

11 million

Number of vehicles that travelled through intersections with cameras in September

$8.4M

The city has recorded 75,471 speed-on-green offences this year (up until September), which has generated a total of $8.4 million

ALL PHOTOS JENNIFER FRIESEN

> **We have seen overall collision numbers creep down in Calgary, and our fatalities are also down just a little bit from last year, too.**
> Staff Sgt. Paul Stacey

COMMON OFFENCE: FAILING TO STOP

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12,114 generating $3M

2014:
14,925 generating $3.4M

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Sheriff dies in crash

TRAGEDY

Driver who hit him also killed — wife, son survive

Jeremy Simes
For Metro | Calgary

RCMP believe speed and distracted driving played a role in Saturday's double-fatal crash that killed an off-duty Alberta Sheriff.

Around 7:30 a.m., Chris Gerbrandt, an Alberta Sheriff in Medicine Hat, was travelling west on Highway 3 when a 2005 Pontiac car crossed the centre lane and onto oncoming traffic.

The driver hit Gerbrandt's Chevrolet truck head-on, killing him and the driver of the car instantly.

Gerbrandt's youngest son and wife were taken to the Foothills Hospital in Calgary with serious, not-life threatening injuries, according to a Gerbrandt's colleague Chris Nguyen.

Gerbrandt's death was announced on 225 Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron's Facebook page Saturday afternoon. Gerbrandt was also a member of the Canadian Armed Forces.

RCMP continue to investigate.

Many sent their condolences to the Gerbrandt family Saturday afternoon, after Chris Gerbrandt was killed driving on Highway 3 Saturday morning. FACEBOOK

RAMSEY

Shamrock Hotel closes

Brodie Thomas
Metro | Calgary

The Shamrock Hotel in Ramsey unexpectedly closed its doors on Saturday.

The hotel and bar has been a popular music venue for many years.

The establishment had a note taped to the door on Saturday announcing it had closed. A similar message was posted to the business' web page.

"For more than two decades, we have proudly served Calgary and the Ramsay Community, providing quality services & products at fair prices in our business," read the message.

"Now with heavy hearts, we announce the closure of Shamrock Hotel, effective immediately. The management wants to thank all our staff and customers and wish you all the best."

Darcy Clendenning of Entertainment Services and Products had booked entertainers there in the past. He said the owners had been looking forward to retirement for many years so it didn't come as a surprise to him.

There's been much online speculation about whether the former hotel will be demolished to make way for construction of the Green Line. Ward 9 Coun. Gian-Carlo Carra said he could neither confirm or deny there was any real estate transaction.

German classes at risk of closing

EDUCATION

Open house to show value of bilingual program

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

The Calgary Board of Education and the school council at Bowcroft School are working to keep the city's only German bilingual program alive.

"This conversation is just starting with the German Bilingual Program parents," said Joanne Anderson with the CBE.

"We will assess the situation in the spring when we have a better idea of the numbers for their kindergarten registration."

Lia Haus, chair for the Bowcross Parents Action Club, has two children enrolled in the program.

Lia Haus's son kicks off a German tradition — on the first day of school children are given a "schuletute" or school bag filled with supplies and treats. COURTESY LIA HAUS

"Everybody know there's French, everybody knows there's Spanish," said Haus. "But there's German in Northwest Calgary, and it's a phenomenal program."

Haus said German is an important language to learn in today's world economy.

"When they're older and they're trying to get jobs, it's one of the top languages to have in the world right now," she said. "It opens up a lot of possibilities for them. For example, university in Germany is essentially free. So, if my children go through this program, and they take the exam at the end and they pass, they are allowed to study in Germany at the university level."

Both Haus and her husband speak German, and she said the program allows her children to learn not only German language skills, but culture as well.

On Feb. 3 at 6 p.m., the school is hosting a German open house to show parents, and potential students, the benefits of the program, by putting on a German play.

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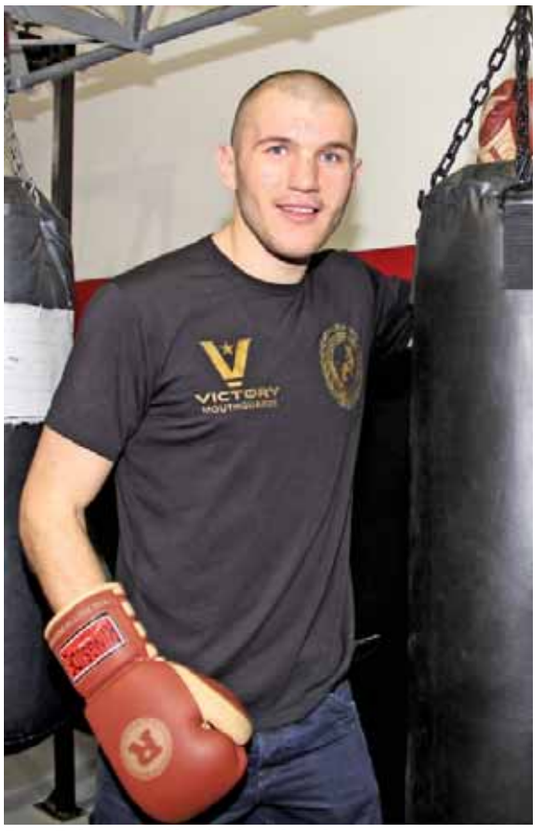

Petru Bolun started boxing less than three years ago, and is now on Canada's national team. BRODIE THOMAS/METRO

Moldovan masher has lofty ring goals

AMATEUR SPORT

Petru Bolun plans to win Olympic gold, then turn pro

Brodie Thomas
Metro | Calgary

It was a chance meeting with a friend that took Petru Bolun down the road toward joining Canada's national boxing team.

The 21-year-old Calgarian had just turned 19 when a friend from his judo class told him about boxing.

"That was on a Saturday night," said Bolun. "He said, 'Tomorrow morning I have a conditioning class.' The next morning at 10 o'clock, I was at the gym."

Bolun's coach, Vlad Goldenstein of Southpaw Boxing Gym, remembers the day well.

"He was a fresh kid and I brought him to a park. They were doing hills. So, I just wasn't in a good mood. I just decided to push him really hard."

Goldenstein realized that Bolun could keep up with the rest, who had been practising for months. He liked what he saw, and when he got the teen in the ring, he knew there was something special about him.

"Once in a while, this kind of kid steps in to the gym and, if you don't recognize it, then you're a bad coach."

Under Goldenstein tutelage, Bolun has fought his way to an 18-0 record, fighting in both heavyweight and light-heavyweight divisions.

He has won two provincial Golden Gloves tournaments, and won a championship at the Ringside Tournament in Kansas City — a place for up-and-coming amateurs.

Bolun is an immigrant from Moldova. He came to Canada at age 15 with his parents, who at first weren't too keen on his chosen sport.

> **Once in a while, this kind of kid steps in to the gym and, if you don't recognize it, then you're bad coach.**
> Vlad Goldenstein

"Any mom doesn't want her kid to get beat up," said Bolun with a grin. "But she saw I was doing pretty well. So she's on board right now."

In a bid to keep his parents happy, Bolun is a full-time student taking process pipe drafting at SAIT. He trains six days a week, and still finds time to work construction on some weekends. But he doesn't see school or construction as something to fall back on.

"The plan is to win the Olympics and go professional right after," he said.

He took one step toward his goal last week in Montreal. He was invited to compete after officials saw his performance in the Golden Gloves. Now that he's made the national team, he is heading to Argentina for the Olympic qualifiers in March.

Goldenstein knows his student has a real chance.

"I'll bet everything on him," said the coach. "If I didn't believe in him, I wouldn't bring him there. It's boxing. It's not table tennis. Your guy can get hurt. But I believe in him."

With his unblemished record, Bolun has confidence too.

"If you don't think you have a shot, you're in the wrong sport," he said. "I think I can beat anybody right now."

Elizabeth Van Egteren has helped launch a letter writing campaign to the government, asking for help to bring her sister's children home. AARON CHATHA/METRO

Calgarians join letter campaign

CRIME

Ex-husband allegedly has missing kids in Kurdistan

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

Friends and family of Alison Azer — the Canadian woman whose four children were allegedly abducted by her ex-husband and taken to the Middle East this summer — have begun a letter writing campaign asking for the Canadian government's intervention.

"We are asking — pleading — people to sign letters to get the government's attention to work with the Kurdistan regional government and negotiate to get our children home," said Azer's sister, Elizabeth Van Egteren, who spent the weekend at the Market at Macleod asking Calgarians to sign letters, which will be sent to government representatives. Other campaigns have been started in St. Albert and Vancouver.

Azer has been in Kurdistan since October trying to get the children back — her ex-husband has allegedly refused to release them. The four children were legally allowed to travel to France and Germany with their father in early August, but were reported missing when they did not return as scheduled.

A warrant was issued for the arrest of their father Saran Azer.

The four children have also been listed as missing on Interpol's website.

Earlier this month, family members said Azer had managed to locate her children.

"It's every mother's nightmare to have to experience something like this," said Melanie Sharpe, Azer's childhood friend.

"The family is very strong; they've been working tirelessly. The support that she has, it's been amazing.

"They've turned from her children, to our children. They're our children, and we need to bring them home."

Egteran said her sister is a phenomenal mother.

"She's absolutely adored by her friend's children — her children are crazy about her. She's smart, she's bright and she's amazingly strong. She's a warrior mother."

Egteran said people can find letter templates and follow updates through the Facebook page Bring Alison's 4 Kids Home.

MOUNT ROYAL

Students urging 'open arms' welcome

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN CANADA

Earlier this year Mayor Naheed Nenshi called on Calgarians to welcome Syrian refugees with open arms — and one group of Mount Royal students is following through on that call with an initiative called Open Arms YYC.

They've asked their fellow students — and Calgarians — to take a picture of themselves in their favourite spot in the city, holding up a sign to welcome refugees. They're also asking people to donate to their fundraising efforts for Doctors without Borders.

"After the Paris attacks, there was a lot of anti-refugee sentiment all over social media and we were really upset about it," said student Desdemona Lunz. "We really wanted to create something as a counter-narrative."

Lunz said the initiative started off inside the classroom, but has quickly expanded beyond the walls of MRU. They have already blown past their fundraising goal of $2,500 for Doctors without Borders.

"With the environment right now, it's not just about people fleeing their homes, but people fleeing their homes and not everyone is ready for the medical expenses," she said. "We've seen the pictures on social media, and this organization just does a wonderful job in providing that much needed relief."

Nenshi has even re-tweeted their efforts.

The group has also been out in the city handing out fact-cards to dispel myths about the incoming refugees. In the new year, after exams, the group hopes to raise money for the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society.

AARON CHATHA/METRO

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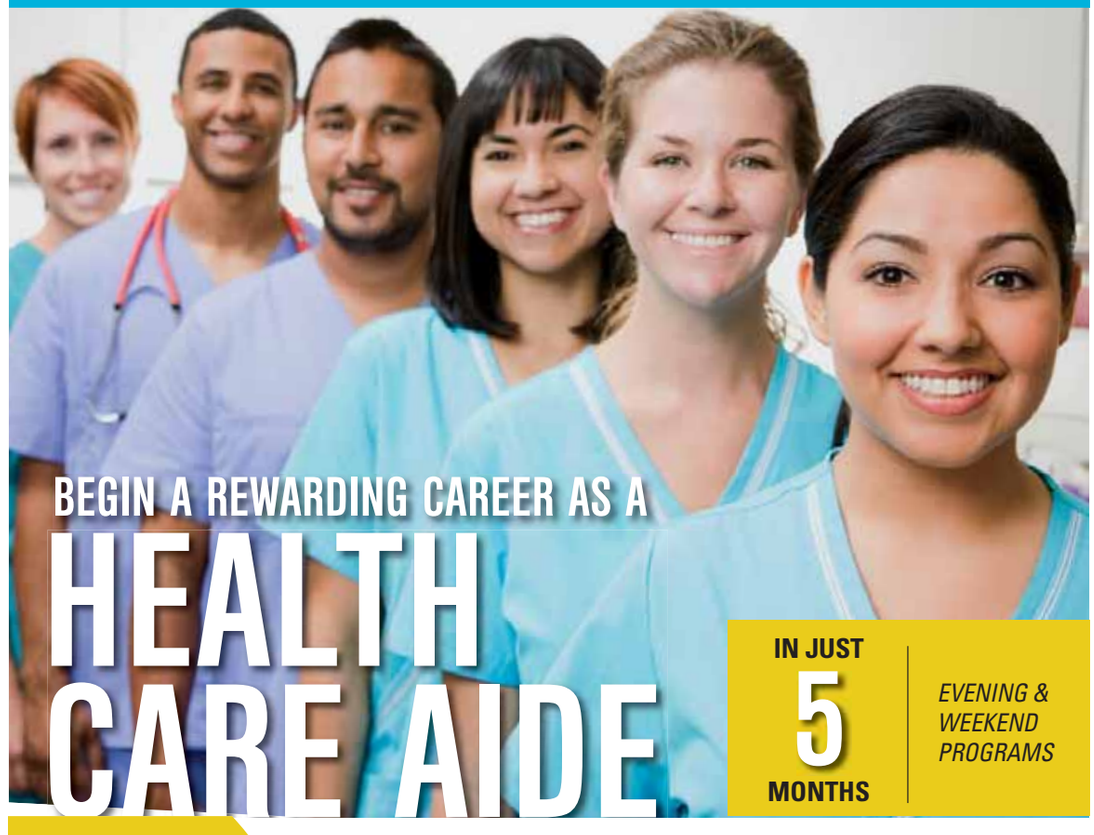

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Newly arrived Syrian refugee Samer Beylouneh, left, wipes a tear as his daughter Laila greets her aunt Marie Belona at a welcome centre in Montreal on Saturday. PAUL CHIASSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS

'Their arrival is a Christmas present'

SYRIAN REFUGEES

Anas Fransis reunited with relatives after 8 years

The arrival of a second federal government planeload of Syrian refugees in Montreal Saturday night was "a real Christmas present" for one Syrian man who was reunited with family he hasn't seen in eight years.

Anas Fransis and his mother were at the welcome centre near the airport to welcome Fransis' uncle and his wife, their two teenage daughters and Fransis' grandmother, who were among the 161 privately sponsored refugees to make the trip from Beirut to Canada aboard a government aircraft.

Fransis ran out to greet them, twirling his cousins and embracing the adults. His grandmother, Laila Saeed, was the last one through the door, her face wet with tears.

"They'll be here for Christmas, they'll be here for New Year's," said Fransis, who came to Canada from Syria in 2008. "Their arrival is a Christmas present ... a real Christmas present."

His 13-year-old cousin Laila Beylouneh was excited for her family's new start.

"My future is starting now," she said in English. "I wish all my dreams will come true."

The arrival comes less than 48 hours after a government aircraft brought 163 refugees to Toronto on Thursday.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

B.C.-BOUND

Relatives of drowned boy to arrive by year's end

The aunt of a Syrian toddler whose lifeless body pictured on a Mediterranean beach sparked global outrage over a refugee crisis says the flights have been booked to bring her relatives to Canada.

Tima Kurdi says her brother Mohammad Kurdi, along with his wife and five children, are scheduled to arrive in British Columbia on Dec. 28.

Mohammad is the uncle of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old boy who died with his mother and older brother when their overcrowded boat flipped while crossing between Turkey and Greece. THE CANADIAN PRESS

VANCOUVER

City wants cash for tree replacements

Emily Jackson
Metro | Vancouver

The City of Vancouver doesn't trust residents to replace trees when they uproot old ones, so it wants to demand a cash deposit until residents can prove they're proper tree parents.

The city wants owners to pay a security deposit of $500 or $750 (depending on the size) when they remove a tree, money the government will keep until owners prove they have planted a new tree and taken good care of it for at least a year, according to a report council will vote on this week.

60

Approximate percentage of trees that live on private property in Vancouver

There is a one-for-one replacement rule for tree removal, but between 25 and 35 per cent of replacement trees die or are removed within their first year, according to the city.

The security deposit is meant to deter people from not planting the replacement tree, planting it in the wrong location, choosing a poor quality tree that won't survive or not taking care of it properly.

It's part of the city's larger strategy to maintain its urban forest.

Since approximately 60 per cent of trees live on private property, the city changed its bylaws last year to require owners to get an inspector's approval before they can remove a tree. (More than 1,700 inspections have been conducted since October 2014; hundreds were denied.)

Should council approve the stricter set of rules, the city will need to hire two more inspectors to monitor how well people are caring for their new trees.

A city worker plants a street tree near Vancouver's Cambie corridor in 2014. EMILY JACKSON/METRO

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The CRA says Ramona Dunn, seen in front of her home in Exeter, Ont., **owes $94,000 in back taxes.** TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Pursued for back taxes

RESERVES

CRA seeks payments from aboriginal employees

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has been aggressively collecting back taxes from a group of mostly low-income indigenous women who lost a long-running legal battle to be exempt from paying personal income taxes because their employer was situated on a reserve.

Native Leasing Services, an employee outsourcing company that has its headquarters on Six Nations of the Grand River, a reserve near Brantford, Ont., is seeking a remission order from National Revenue Minister Diane Lebouthillier — who would have to recommend it to cabinet for approval — on behalf of 3,916 former employees.

"Most of the applicants live on or near the poverty line ... A large portion of these employees will never be able to pay the tax assessments that have been made against them," Jim Fyshe, a lawyer working pro-bono for Native Leasing Services, wrote in the application for a remission order filed in June 2013.

The employees, whose annual income at Native Leasing Services averaged about $27,000, according to Fyshe, are being pursued by collections officers who are putting liens on their homes, garnishing their wages and clawing back benefits for years of personal income taxes after the courts supported a decision by Canada Revenue Agency to reinterpret the Indian Act.

One of them is Ramona Dunn, 53, who the CRA says owes nearly $94,000 in taxes, fines and interest for the five years she worked as a registered nurse and diabetes educator at Anishnawbe Health Toronto, where she was technically an employee of Native Leasing Services.

Dunn said she took the job at the non-profit agency for a smaller salary than she would have earned at a hospital.

"I was willing to work for less money than my skill set would have given for me just for the chance of working in my community and helping my people," Dunn said, adding the tax exemption, which she still believes she has a right to as a status Indian, helped make up some of the difference in take-home pay.

Philippe Brideau, a CRA spokesman, said remission orders are considered on a case-by-case basis.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

> **Never in a million years would I have thought they would go after me.**
> Ramona Dunn

INNOVATION

A grinder that may not go to pot

A group of Winnipeg entrepreneurs are busting their way into the marijuana scene by re-inventing a 110-year-old design called The Clipper.

Matt Olsen said he, Greg Moneta and Jesse Marr came up with the idea to create a brand new and innovative "herb" grinder.

Olsen said the idea stems from complaints of traditional grinder users.

The biggest difference is a rotating stainless-steel blade and a patented wedge design that the group says cuts herbs rather than mulches them and drastically reduces user effort.

The product's users, such as Keely Middleton, said they are noticing a difference.

"The blade is a game changer because it doesn't build up resin in the teeth and hinder the ability to turn and grind," said Middleton.

The Clipper with its newly designed blades. CONTRIBUTED

Olsen and Marr said they're in the midst of a crowdfunding campaign via Indiegogo. They're now in the last two-week push to hit $25,000. So far they've raised $16,000.

The group said it is in partnership with Lift Innovations and has already been approached by distributors who want to carry the product.

Olsen and Marr said they are looking to establish an e-commerce store and are building a worldwide distribution plan.

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Planet on a 'carbon diet'

ENVIRONMENT

Close to 200 nations sign on to ambitious Paris eco-pact

The world is about to go on a carbon diet and it won't be easy — or cheap.

Nearly 200 nations worldwide approved a first-of-its-kind universal agreement Saturday to wean Earth off fossil fuels and slow global warming.

On Sunday morning, as with many first day dieters, the reality set in. The numbers — like calorie limits and gym time — are daunting.

How daunting? Try more than 7.04 billion tons. That's how much carbon dioxide needs to stay in the ground instead of being spewed into the atmosphere for those reductions to happen — if you take the easier of two goals mentioned in Saturday's deal. To get to the harder goal, the number is even larger.

In the pact, the countries pledged to limit global warming to about another degree Celsius — and if they can, only half that much.

A vaguer goal is that by sometime in the second half of the century, man-made greenhouse gas emissions — including methane and other heat-trapping gases as well as carbon dioxide — won't exceed the amount nature absorbs. Earth's complex and ever-changing carbon cycle would have to get back to balance.

In practice, the world will have to emit almost zero greenhouse gases by 2070 to reach the easier goal, or by 2050 to reach the harder one, said John Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany.

The harder goal — limit warming by another half a degree Celsius — is probably already impossible, said Joeri Rogelj at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria. Most likely the best the world can hope for is overshooting by a few tenths of a degree and then slowly bring the temperature back down to the target. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The slogan "DECARBONIZE" is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the COP21 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France on Dec. 11. FRACOIS MORI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLIMATE PLAN

'The best chance we have'

President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry hailed the newly passed international climate change agreement as a major achievement that could help turn the tide on global warming.

Obama said the climate agreement made Saturday night by almost 200 nations "offers the best chance we have to save the one planet we have" and credited his administration for playing a key role.

The immediate reaction of leading Republican critics was a stark reminder of the conflict that lies ahead. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Obama is "making promises he can't keep." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"The world has both the will and the ability to take on this challenge.
U.S. President Barack Obama

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Marine Le Pen draws a blank

FRANCE

National Front fail to take a single region in election

Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front collapsed in French regional elections Sunday, failing to take a single region after dominating the first round of voting, pollsters projected. The conservatives surged against the governing Socialists, changing the political map of France.

The failure of the National Front to gain any of the six regions where it was leading didn't stop the anti-immigration party from looking to the 2017 presidential election — Le Pen's ultimate goal.

Le Pen had been riding high after extremist attacks and an unprecedented wave of migration into Europe, and the party came out on top in the voting in France's 13 newly drawn regions in the first round a week ago. But projections by France's major polling firms suggested the party lost in all of the regions Sunday, including decisive losses for both Le Pen and her popular niece.

"Here we stopped the progression of the National Front," said conservative Xavier Bertrand, who was projected to beat Le Pen in the Nord-Pas de Calais region.

Le Pen supporters in a hall in the gritty northern town of Henin-Beaumont booed his image on a big screen as he spoke. The atmosphere was grim, in stark contrast to a week earlier when Le Pen won more than 40 per cent of the vote — and was more than 15 points ahead of Bertrand. The tables turned on Sunday as Bertrand beat Le Pen by nearly 15 points.

Le Pen struck an upbeat tone despite the rout, pledging she would in the coming weeks "rally all the French, of all origins, who want to join us."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Nothing will stop us."
Marine Le Pen

MYANMAR POLITICIAN LAUNCHES CLEANUP DRIVE Leader of National League for Democracy party (NLD) Aung San Suu Kyi, centre, picks garbage during a cleanup drive initiated by Suu Kyi in Kawhmu, Myanmar on Sunday. Suu Kyi led the garbage collection on early foggy Sunday in Kawhmu township of Yangon region, where she won her seat for the Lower House in the country's general election. GEMUNU AMARASINGHE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Syrian rebels strike Damascus suburb

Rebels entrenched in an eastern suburb of Damascus fired volleys of mortar shells into the Syrian capital on Sunday, killing three people, including a child, and wounding 33, Syria's state-run news agency and residents said. Government forces hit back with airstrikes that activists said killed at least 28 people.

The Damascus suburb, known as Eastern Ghouta, is held by rebels fighting to topple President Bashar Assad who often launch mortars into Damascus, his seat of power.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Unrest in Burundi prompts order of evacuation

The Canadian and U.S. governments asked their citizens to leave Burundi as soon as possible Sunday after 87 people were killed Friday in an escalation of the violence surrounding the disputed third term of President Pierre Nkurunziza. The Dec. 11 fighting was deemed the worst in months of turmoil since April. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Brazilians take to streets in protest

POLITICS

Scandal and a weak economy the root causes of mass unrest

Thousands of Brazilians marched Sunday to demand that Congress impeach President Dilma Rousseff, whose government is plagued by an overwhelming corruption scandal and a dismal economy.

The protests were held in dozens of places including the capital of Brasilia and the opposition stronghold of Sao Paulo, but were considerably smaller than demonstrations earlier this year.

One difference is impeachment proceedings have already begun. Lower House Speaker Eduardo Cunha, a bitter rival of Rousseff, introduced a petition to impeach the president earlier this month. The Supreme Court suspended the discussion while it reviews how Congress formed the commission to debate the measure.

Many people at the protests wore Brazil's national soccer jersey. Others held banners condemning Rousseff's party for a kickback scheme at state-run oil company Petrobras.

Although most complaints were related to the corruption scandal, Rousseff is facing impeachment on the argument her administration broke fiscal laws by using state-run banks to fill budget gaps.

The country is also in a deep recession with forecasts saying growth should contract by 3.5 per cent in 2015. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

People hold a Brazilian flag during a demonstration for the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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CALIFORNIA

Man arrested after mosque set ablaze

A 23-year-old man has been arrested on suspicion of committing a hate crime and arson in connection with a Southern California mosque fire, authorities said Saturday.

Carl James Dial Jr., of Palm Desert, was arrested late Friday and booked for investigation of commission of a hate crime, arson, maliciously setting a fire and burglary, according to a Riverside County sheriff's statement and jail records.

Dial was being held in lieu of $150,000 bail.

His father, John Dial, said in a telephone interview that his son should be considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Flames were reported just after noon Friday at the Islamic Center of Palm Springs. The fire was contained to the small building's front lobby, and no one was injured.

People at the mosque described hearing a "loud boom" and seeing flames, said Reymundo Nour, the mosque's acting imam, who was not on the site at the time. He said the mosque had been firebombed. Authorities provided no details on how the fire was set.

State fire investigators, the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the FBI are assisting in the investigation.

> **"I believe he was lacking in social skills."**
> John Dial, father of the accused in a mosque fire

John Dial told NBC News he saw his son carrying a backpack on Friday and assumed he was going to class at a local college. He said his son struggled socially.

"He was caught up in social media. Social media has produced people like my son, without person-to-person contact," he said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAUDI ARABIA

Women claim 20 local seats in vote

Saudi voters elected 20 women for local government seats, according to results released to The Associated Press on Sunday, a day after women voted and ran in elections for the first time in the country's history.

The women who won hail from vastly different parts of the country, ranging from Saudi Arabia's largest city to a small village near Islam's holiest site.

The 20 female candidates represent just one per cent of the roughly 2,100 municipal council seats up for grabs, but even limited gains are seen as a step forward for women who had previously been completely shut out of elections. Women are still not allowed to drive and are governed by guardianship laws that give men final say over aspects of their lives like marriage, travel and higher education.

Though there are no quotas for female council members, an additional 1,050 seats are appointed with approval by the king who could use his powers to ensure more women are represented.

Around 7,000 candidates, among them 979 women, competed in the election for a seat on the municipal councils, which are the only government body elected by Saudi citizens. The two previous rounds of voting for the councils, in 2005 and 2011, were open to men only. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RETAIL

Holidays tricky to market: Expert

When something as simple as a red Starbucks cup stirred a controversy stateside over how businesses mark the approach of Christmas, Canadian retailers took notice.

Retailers across the country are well aware that how they market the holidays in an increasingly multicultural society is a sensitive issue. The way in which retailers approach the weeks leading up to the end of the year has evolved over time as businesses respond to customer reactions.

This year's Starbucks controversy, which hogged headlines in the U.S. in November, shone a spotlight on the issue. Executives said they wanted to embrace "simplicity and quietness." But some religious conservatives saw the new cup as a blow against tradition.

The entire episode underscored how carefully businesses need to consider their holiday marketing.

About a decade ago, retailers who didn't want to offend any segment of Canada's multicultural society removed the word Christmas from much of their marketing, said Michael LeBlanc, senior vice-president of marketing with the Retail Council of Canada.

Businesses now appear to have permission from most Canadians to use the word Christmas as Dec. 25 approaches without it being taken as an affront to those who don't celebrate the occasion, he said.

"Sites now say 'the holidays are here' and truly, I think that's a reflection of the season," said LeBlanc. "But then as you get in closer, you hone in on Christmas."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

As home prices soar out of reach for many, a growing number of Canadians are turning to alternative styles of housing — such as this tiny house in Victoria. CONTRIBUTED/ THE CANADIAN PRESS

Canadians turn to pint-size housing

LIVING SPACES

Affordability, saving time some reasons for downsizing

Nine years ago, Thelma Fayle swapped her 4,000 square-foot home in a rural area of Victoria for a house measuring only nine feet wide on the inside after finding it exhausting to take care of her property.

The desire to save time is one of several factors cited by the growing number of Canadians who are turning to alternative styles of housing, ranging from narrow houses to tiny ones to those sandwiched into laneways between other homes.

Other factors include environmental considerations — smaller homes require less power to heat — and affordability concerns, as home prices in certain Canadian cities continue to soar out of reach for many.

In Toronto, developer Adam Ochshorn says his company, Curated Properties, has found a niche in building homes for families who have been priced out of the market for detached houses but don't want to migrate out to the suburbs or live in a glass tower. Ochshorn has several projects in the works that preserve elements of the traditional detached house format — multi-floor living with an outdoor terrace — but in unconventional spaces and at a lower price point.

For some, like Connor Ferster, alternative living is less about affordability and more about wanting to live off the grid. In the winter of 2013 to 2014, Ferster ditched his studio apartment in downtown Calgary for a teepee 45 minutes outside the city. The following summer, he built a 96-square foot home on wheels.

Of course, the shift to compact living comes with some challenges. Ottawa-based architect and tiny home expert Andy Thomson, who himself is sharing a 500 square-foot space with his wife and their 11-year-old child, says the key to getting by in a constrained space is to have "furniture that's like a swiss army knife" — such as shelving units and beds that fold into the walls.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

ECONOMY

Liberal deficit could hit $25 billion a year

Now that the federal Liberals have shied away from their vow to keep annual deficits under $10 billion, they've latched on to another fiscal target.

The new government is suddenly talking about the debt-to-GDP ratio, promising to keep it on a downward track every year until the next election.

The government calculates its debt-to-GDP ratio by dividing total federal debt by the overall size of the economy, as measured by nominal GDP.

It represents a government's capacity to pay back debt — and focusing on it gives politicians more spending flexibility. By targeting debt-to-GDP, the Liberals could instead be prepared to run annual deficits of up to $25 billion in the coming years and still lower the ratio — as long as the economy grows at a decent pace, economists say.

The adoption of the debt-to-GDP ratio as a "fiscal anchor" is not new. It was mentioned in the Liberal election platform as one of the ways to keep spending under control. The campaign rhetoric, however, largely focused on the $10-billion annual deficit.

0.9%

The government expects nominal GDP for 2015 to only grow by 0.9 per cent largely due to the squeeze of low oil prices, according to its fall fiscal update.

With uncosted election promises piling up on top of unforeseen shortfalls in the underlying fiscal plan, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has emphasized the more-reachable fiscal anchor in recent days.

"We will continue to decrease (the debt-to-GDP ratio) every single year because that's important for the fiscal health of our country," Trudeau said Wednesday, after casting further doubt on the $10-billion annual deficit target because of economic challenges.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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metro VIEWS
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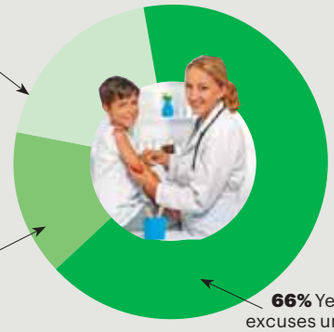
Metro MONDAY POLL

One nation under vaccination

Visit metronews.ca **every Friday to have your say.**

Under a proposed Ontario law, parents will have to attend an education session at the local public-health unit if they want a vaccine exemption for non-medical reasons. Few things have been more explosively controversial — or more maligned — in recent years than vaccinations, though evidence conclusively shows they're safe and effective. In fact, they're so effective that many of us have never personally encountered a vaccine-preventable illness. We asked our readers for forgotten family stories about the fear-filled days before shots prevented some of the most deadly diseases.

1 Should all routine vaccinations be mandatory in Canada?


19% No, it should be up to parents
15% No , but there should be a serious consequence for not vaccinating (i.e. a financial penalty, or being banned from school)
66% Yes, no excuses unless there is a valid health exception

2 How do you keep track of vaccinations for yourself or your family?

41% Old-fashioned paper
36% I trust my doctor, school or health unit to keep track
16% I don't. One of us is probably due for a booster
7% Digitally/ with an app

3 What's your experience with vaccine-preventable diseases?

40% I've never had one & don't know anyone who has.
32% I've suffered from a vaccine-preventable disease.
17% A family member or someone I know has had one.
11% Either myself, someone I know or a family member has suffered permanent effects of a vaccine-preventable disease.

My grandfather was partially paralyzed for life due to polio.

We had to cancel a trip because someone at my son's daycare got chickenpox.

I contracted measles as a small child and was left partly deaf.

I had measles, mumps and chickenpox before there were vaccines. They were all miserable.

WE ASKED Metro readers

Slow clap for farming families resisting Bill 6

KINGKADE'S CALGARY

Roger Kingkade

The saga of Bill 6 is over. For now. The last chapter may be yet to be authored.

Admittedly, it feels counter-intuitive to be writing a column about a rural issue in a paper called Metro, but this is more than just an obligatory shout out to the farm folk. This is an honest-to-goodness genuine slow clap for a group of proud Albertans who won't be pushed around.

Bill 6 was presented as an important bit of legislation near and dear to our new premier's heart. It is ostensibly about protecting farm workers by making farms safer. A cursory examination of the bill reveals that it reaches far beyond that. It is effectively an omnibus bill (the kind progressives really hated under the Harper regime) that combines a little bit of farm/workplace safety with all the trappings of a union-approved work environment.

The government showed flagrant disregard for a valuable cohort of Albertans.

The government was so narrowly focused in their ambition to bring this bill in, the premier didn't bother to explain it to the bureaucrats or a few ministers she would later blame for the miscommunications. As government business goes, this was the very definition of a cluster-something.

But it gets worse. The very people who drafted this bill from some coal-powered, gas-heated office somewhere in Edmonton tried to put it over on farmers during a time of year when farmers actually have time to pay attention to politics because they aren't doing something more important, like working 16 hours a day.

The government acted in a way that showed flagrant disregard for a valuable cohort of Albertans. You don't have to be, know, or love a farmer to feel that no group so large should be force fed a law by an ideology-driven majority. When the PCs brought in legislation that sought to make it illegal to talk about job action, we responded the same way. By asking, "Why are you being jerks about this?"

Good on you, my agrarian brothers and sisters. Good on you for putting your principles on display. Good for you for organizing visibly and respectfully and for making very reasonable demands like asking for clarification, appropriate amendments, and to be included in the process.

The family farm is a lifestyle that has just been kicked by Bill 6. All these people want is to live a quiet life and feed the community.

Alberta farmers had to abandon the quiet life for a few weeks, but they didn't stop feeding the community.

At those rallies and town-hall meetings, farmers collected thousands of pounds of food for local food banks. That never really got much mention amid the ruckus.

Slow clap indeed.

Bill 6 passed final reading and will become law next year. But farmers don't forget. And the last chapter on this may be written in 2019 if they close the book on the NDP.

Roger Kingkade co-hosts the Kingkade and Breakenridge show every weekday morning at 9:30 a.m. on NewsTalk 770.

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD

metroview

Stumped? I'm here to help with your hard-to-buy-for list

You're very busy, I know.

You have 15 people to buy presents for, and that's not even counting yourself. Sure, you made a trip to the mall, but it took three days to find your way out again (online shopping has decimated your mall-navigation skills).

Well, I'm here to offer a few tips for those hard-to-buy-for listees.

Let's start in the obvious place: Justin Trudeau. Now that he's a sex symbol in the U.S. (those Vogue photos? Grrrr!), he's likely wondering what this means for his future memoir endeavours. Common Ground was a bit of political positioning ahead of the election. It's far too on-the-nose for a sex-symbol memoir, which should include much more innuendo and tongue-in-cheek asides, if not some actual cheek — and thus I recommend you gift him Burt Reynolds' new memoir But Enough About Me (no, not "Butt"). There's apparently a lot more to Burt than his 1970s nude centrefold, and Trudeau, reduced to his broad chest, strong jaw and wavy hair by the U.S. press, may need, one day, to make a similar argument after posing tastefully nude to raise awareness about climate change.

On to the next: Angela Merkel, Time magazine 2015 Person of the Year.

Perhaps you don't speak German or know much about Germany or even how to properly pronounce her name, though it's really not that hard (it's a hard "g"). You perhaps do know that she is considered a modern-day international-diplomacy and left-wing-enough Wonder Woman. Hence, the perfect gift is Jill Lepore's The Secret History of Wonder Woman. There are always lessons for politicians to be found in history, and this book charts Wonder Woman's connection to first-wave feminism and details of her creator's love of S&M. Like I said, much to learn.

Of course your shopping list won't be dealt with purely by a trip to your local, independent bookstore that's been around so long it's practically heritage designated.

So, for the ISIL fighter on your list, you'll need to head online and research the right fine French perfume, or perhaps a Twix chocolate bar. Let me explain: in a recent interview on National Public Radio, a man who'd escaped from an ISIL-controlled town detailed the fascination ISIL fighters have with Western goods, even luxury cars. So if you can afford it, splurge on a Ferrari.

And there you have it: Christmas made easy! Happy shopping and ho ho ho!

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metro LIFE

Your essential daily news

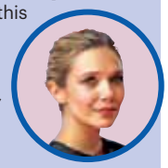
Nailed it! Kerry Washington is OPI's new creative ambassador

GOSSIP BRIEFS

Has Swift gone mad with trademarking power?

Taylor Swift decided to close out her banner year by trying to trademark a whole slew of terms, including "Blank space," "Swiftmas" and "1989." Swift filed 20 trademark applications in all. NED EHRBAR/FOR METRO

Elizabeth Olsen dumped fiancé over the phone



Oh man, this is rough. Actor Boyd Holbrook, former fiancé of Elizabeth Olsen, apparently feels like enough time has gone by to vent his frustrations about the demise of their relationship — a breakup neither had officially confirmed before now.

"On the same day that my best friend died, I got a call from my girl to tell me it was over," Holbrook tells Man of the World magazine, referring to the split as a "divorce," even. The one-two punch of Olsen's breakup call and friend David Armstrong's death led Holbrook to become "consumed with my own personal depression," he says, though he did eventually cheer himself up over the past 10 months. NED EHRBAR/FOR METRO

Fashion Santa is the new red

Paul Mason, also known as Fashion Santa, has gained international attention for his collaboration with Yorkdale Shopping Centre as the Toronto mall's Fashion Santa. Mason is taking selfies with shoppers to raise funds for The Hospital for Sick Children. CHRIS NICHOLLS/HANDOUT/THE CANADIAN PRESS

PAUL MASON

Long-time model takes selfies for SickKids

Paul Mason has devoted three decades to modelling, but the worldwide attention he's received for his stylish take on Santa Claus is a fashionable first.

Toronto's Yorkdale Shopping Centre enlisted Mason as its resident Fashion Santa and the face of the mall's holiday campaign.

During the festive season, he is also posing for selfies with shoppers in support of SickKids Foundation, which raises funds on behalf of Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

But beyond his own white beard and a penchant for red and white, Mason shares little else in common with the jolly old elf — and that's part of what's made him an overnight sensation.

The 6-foot-1 model has made a splash posing in sleek designer wear and striking poses in and around the mall showcasing his modern twist on St. Nick.

The images have gone viral, garnering attention from magazines like Time, Fortune and Harper's Bazaar, and press from across the pond from the Telegraph newspaper and BBC.

"It's just the most unexpected thing," said Mason, 51.

"Of course, I've had a long career — 30 years as a model prior to social media — and this is something else. I've never seen anything like it.

"Through working all over the world, I have friends in all the major cities, and collectively they've come together and just supported what's going on. But they're equally as shocked as anyone else."

Mason collaborated with Yorkdale last year, but the shopping centre embarked on a larger promotional push with this year's campaign, said marketing director Lucia Connor.

Connor said she believes part of the intense interest stems from the ability of adults to reconnect with a part of their childhood.

"When we speak to some of the customers that come through to see Santa, the adults get so excited and they say: 'The last time I took a photo with Santa I was young, I was little,'" she said.

"I think now what people are able to do is now proudly display their own photo of adult Fashion Santa, and instead of the mantel, they're displaying it on their social media feeds."

Mason is slated to take on Fashion Santa duty at the mall on Dec. 18, 19, 20 and 23.

For every selfie taken and posted on social media and accompanied by the hashtag "YorkdaleFashionSanta," Yorkdale will donate $1 to SickKids Foundation, up to $10,000. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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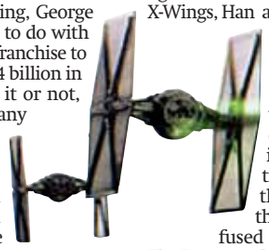
Your Star Wars primer

In four days, the Force will awaken for the first time in a decade.

A new Star Wars movie is coming out, and in case you haven't heard, advance ticket sales have shattered records. Star Wars-branded merchandise has already done $1 billion in sales — and no one's even seen the movie yet.

But after 38 years, six feature-length films and more novels, comics and TV shows than you can shake a lightsaber at, why is the world going crazy for another Star Wars movie?

Well, for one thing, George Lucas had nothing to do with it, having sold the franchise to Disney for a cool $4 billion in 2012. And believe it or not, that's a relief to many diehard fans.



They had their hearts broken when Lucas decided to alter his original masterpieces in the 1990s by inserting gratuitous computer animation and changing essential details in character-defining scenes (read: Greedo shooting first).

Then there's the nostalgia factor. The last time anyone got this excited for a new Star Wars movie, we got Jar Jar Binks and a sour taste in our mouths for the price of admission. But those were the prequels — weird, lame prequels that took some of our favourite characters and ideas, and blew them up like the Death Star blew up Alderaan.

To that end, Disney has very consciously tried to entwine this new film with the classics we all know and love. The trailers are light on new characters, heavy on X-Wings, Han and Chewie, and goosebump-inducing shots of the Millennium Falcon.

So for every fan who's been holding on to their VHS copies of the original trilogy, for every kid that came out of the theatre in 1999 confused and disappointed, The Force Awakens has been a long time coming.

Follow Colin McNeil on Twitter @McNeilColin

BIG SCREEN CIRCA 1977 ON SMALL SCREEN

How to watch the originals, originally

For a long time, VHS copies of the original trilogy, pre-George Lucas tampering, were the only legal way to see the movies without the 1990s special edition changes. That changed in 2006 when the original theatrical versions were released on a limited edition DVD bonus disc.

But even those versions are poor quality. The DVD transfers are not formatted for modern TVs, and suffer from colour issues. And the VHS versions... well, they're on VHS.

My suggestion? If you truly want to watch the films as they were originally released, with the right colours, cuts and frames, there is a lovingly crafted fan-made version of the first film available online in HD called The Despecialized Edition.

A years-long project with many collaborators, The Despecialized Edition edits, colour corrects and tweaks nearly every frame of Episode IV: A New Hope to bring it back to exactly (or damn close to) how it appeared on the big screen in 1977. COLIN MCNEIL/METRO

STAR WARS A TIMELINE OF THE UNIVERSE

Grab the popcorn and tell your protocol droid to hold your calls. We've got the ultimate, chronologically ordered Star Wars watchlist.

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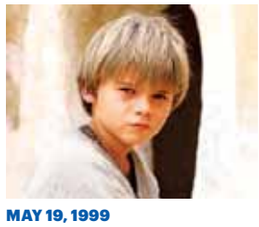

MAY 19, 1999

Ep. I: The Phantom Menace

Jedi Knights Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn battle an evil Sith Lord called Darth Maul. Meanwhile, a young slave named Anakin Skywalker discovers his latent abilities in the Force.

GROSS $474,544,677

MAY 16, 2002

Ep. II: Attack of the Clones

Ten years later, Obi-Wan begins to unravel dark threads hinting at machinations behind a separatist war within the Galactic Republic, while Anakin falls in love with the former Queen of the planet he helped save as a boy.

GROSS $310,675,583

2003, 2008

Clone Wars

Two separate cartoon shows, Star Wars: Clone Wars (2003) and Star Wars: The Clone Wars (2008) bridge the three-year gap between Episodes II and III.

GROSS N/A

MAY 19, 2005

Ep. III: Revenge of the Sith

After a Sith Lord called Darth Sidious seizes the Republic in a political coup, he orders all Jedi exterminated. Embracing the dark side of the Force, Anakin joins him and becomes Darth Vader.

GROSS $380,262,555

2014, 1985

Rebels; Droids; and Ewoks

Three separate animated series, Rebels chronicles the genesis of the rebellion against the Galactic Empire, Ewoks follows a cast of the cuddly critters, and Droids the beloved characters C-3PO and R2-D2.

GROSS N/A

Frozen in carbonite for the last 38 years? Recently returned from exile on Dagobah? You can still turn your watercooler into the Mos Eisley Cantina with this Star Wars 101 crash course, just in time for The Force Awakens on Dec. 18. **COLIN MCNEIL/METRO**

3 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 All in the family

The ties that bind the Star Wars universe — through its soon-to-be seven films, myriad novels and television shows — are familial ones. The story begins with a young Anakin Skywalker, who (spoiler alert!) grows into a Jedi Knight, falls to the Dark Side, and is defeated by his own children, Luke and Leia.

And it gets much deeper: Luke's mentors are the same as his father's, his droid companion C-3PO was built by his father. Darth Sidious (a.k.a Emperor Palpatine) hails from the same planet as Luke's mother.

With The Force Awakens set 30 years after Return of the Jedi, and a slew of new characters, it's a safe bet the Skywalker and Solo family trees will grow more branches. Just who are they and how are they related to the Skywalker legacy? Not even Jedi clairvoyance could reveal that.

2 The Force?

Obi-Wan Kenobi called the Force an "energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together." That's the philosophical view.

The prequel trilogy, much to the displeasure of many Star Wars fans, boiled the Force down to quantifiable, microscopic particles called midi-chlorians. The higher a being's midi-chlorian count, the more potentially powerful they could be in the ways of the Force.

There are two very broad categories of Force users — light side and dark side. The light side of the Force is all about peace, love and knowledge. Namaste. The dark side are the naughty ones — they use raw emotions like anger, fear and even love as their power base.

3 Empire vs. Rebellion

The bad guys in the original Star Wars trilogy, and likely in The Force Awakens, are the Galactic Empire — a totalitarian regime ruled by a Sith lord. The Empire is a xenophobic organization that enforces its rule of law with blaster rifles and storm troopers. In past films, they have not hesitated to commit genocide on a planetary scale.

The rebellion is a group of volunteer freedom fighters who stand against the Empire, trying to restore the Republic of old. Always outnumbered and outgunned, they fought a desperate battle against the Empire, finally toppling it thanks in large part to a young man named Luke Skywalker.

From what we know from the Episode VII trailers, The Empire, or a splinter of it, has survived decades after the fall of the second Death Star.

MAY 25, 1977

Ep. IV: A New Hope

Luke Skywalker, son of Anakin, joins a rebellion against what is now the Galactic Empire — a totalitarian regime ruled by Darth Vader and his master, Sidious. Luke befriends smuggler Han Solo and rebellion leader Princess Leia.

GROSS $460,998,007

JUNE 20, 1980

Ep. V: The Empire Strikes Back

Luke trains with the last of the Jedi masters — Yoda — in preparation for his battle with Darth Vader, while Han Solo and Leia are betrayed by an old friend. Vader reveals he is Luke's father.

GROSS $290,158,751

MAY 25, 1983

Ep. VI: Return of the Jedi

While Luke confronts his father and Emperor Palpatine personally, Han and Leia help rebel forces topple the Empire once and for all in a climactic space battle.

GROSS $309,125,409

1970S TO PRESENT

The lost storylines

For decades between the films, fans have sated their appetite for Star Wars with an entire galaxy of novels and comics. These books have now been officially de-canonized by Disney, leaving many beloved storylines in timeline purgatory.

GROSS N/A

DEC. 18, 2015

Ep. VII: The Force Awakens

The plot details of Episode VII are a closely guarded secret, but we do know Luke, Han and Leia feature in it, alongside new protagonists and a sinister looking Sith called Kylo Ren. It takes place 30 years after Episode VI.

PRE-SALE GROSS $50,000,000+

WHO'S WHO

Droids

A catchall term for robots, shorthand for androids. Anything made of metal that moves around, bleeps and bloops or speaks is a droid. Though sentient, they possess no inherent rights or freedoms as beings.

Stormtroopers

The mainstay of the Empire's foot soldiers, these iconically armoured warriors have been present in nearly every Star Wars film. And yes, they're human beings underneath the armour.

Sleek spaceships

Almost true characters themselves, Star Wars symbolism is rife with iconic spaceships like the rough and tough Millennium Falcon, the darkly sleek Tie fighters, and the rebels' go-to space fighter of choice, the X-Wing.

Sith

The evil antithesis to the Jedi, they harness the power of the Dark Side of the Force. There can be only two Sith in existence at one time — a master, and an apprentice. These guys wield red lightsabers and adopt a 'decapitate first, ask questions later' attitude.

Jedi

Somewhere between medieval knights of Arthurian legend and mystic druids, Jedi are Force users who tap into the light side, using their power only for defence and knowledge.

COLIN MCNEIL/ METRO

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JOHANNA SCHNELLER **WHAT I'M WATCHING**

Miley Cyrus with George Clooney, left, and Bil Murray in A Very Murray Christmas. CONTRIBUTED

Miley puts the merry in Murray Christmas

THE SHOW A VERY MURRAY CHRISTMAS (NETFLIX)

THE MOMENT THE MILEY MIRACLE

For 40 minutes, we've watched people be sad. Bill Murray has the Christmas blues. A snowstorm has kept his guests from showing up at Manhattan's Carlysle Hotel to tape his holiday special. He trades barbs with his agents (Amy Poehler and Julie White). He talks to a distressed bride and groom (Rashida Jones and Jason Schwartzman).

Finally, something magical happens: Murray passes out, and into his dream, on a sleigh, rides… Miley Cyrus. She wears a fur-trimmed red mini with matching pumps. She sits on a white grand piano and belts out Silent Night. She saves Christmas — and Murray's ass.

I'm not saying there isn't a place for sadness during the holidays. There is. But this is ironic sadness, and Christmas and irony do not go well together. You end up feeling nothing.

Murray, director Sophia Coppola, and writer Mitch Glazer clearly are enamoured with the random nature of holiday specials — how celebs just show up and sing. Unfortunately, they don't seem to realize that the randomness had a point: the singing (example: Bing Crosby and David Bowie's famous duet of The Little Drummer Boy). This has entirely too much croaking. It's an un-special.

Also, it may be heretic for me to say this, but I'm growing weary of Murray. He was smart to dole himself out sparingly all these years. When you see too much of him, you realize how thin his schtick is. His natural role is sending out quips from the sidelines. Miley is a star.

Johanna Schneller is a media connoisseur who zeroes in on pop-culture moments. She appears Monday through Thursday.

ANIMATED HOLIDAY SPECIAL

Nutcracker with a lot of puck

Only in Canada would an animated The Nutcracker special be given a hockey twist.

The Curse of Clara: a Holiday Tale is based on Vickie Fagan's autobiographical short story recalling her days dancing in The Nutcracker for the National Ballet of Canada. The year is 1972 and a young ballerina reaches into the hockey world for inspiration — specifically, a legendary Canada-U.S.S.R showdown.

One of the stars of that unforgettable series was former Boston Bruins scoring ace Phil Esposito. The centreman led the NHL professionals to a come-from-behind win against the perennial Olympic hockey champs from what was then known as the Soviet Union. In the special, Esposito's heroics — and charisma — inspire a young ballerina to dance to her goal.

Esposito lends his voice to the special along with veteran Hockey Night in Canada play-by-play announcer Bob Cole — who called the actual Summit Series on radio that September of 1972 — former prima ballerina Karen Kain, Sheila McCarthy, Sara Botsford and Saara Chaudry.

The special premieres Dec. 14 on CBC. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Hockey meets ballet in The Curse of Clara. SMILEY GUY STUDIOS

Know the cost of home ownership

Owning a home comes with unexpected costs. Make sure you budget two to four per cent of your home's value for yearly maintenance costs. ISTOCK

PLANNING

Your budget needs to cover more than just the mortgage

Gail Vaz-Oxlade
For Metro Canada

Owning a home is an expensive proposition.

People think all you have to do is figure out whether you can afford the mortgage payments and taxes. They're wrong.

Owning a home requires planning and a big commitment in terms of time and money. Lots of people who think that they're ready have seriously miscalculated. And then their dream home turns into a money pit.

Another mistake new homeowners make is not changing anything about the way they spend their money once they move into a place of their own. Sure, their housing costs have gone up, but so what? If you're used to buying whatever you want, whenever you want, and you keep up that bad habit, in no time at all, you'll be floundering.

Time to swap some bad habits for some good ones.

It's sometimes pretty hard to see what you're doing wrong, so it's good to know that your partner will be willing and able to spot your flaws and point them out to you. Ha!

And, of course, the best way to see the error of one's ways is to put a dollar value on the stuff you've been buying.

Whether it's junk food or expensive shampoo, once you add up what that indulgence is costing over the long term, you'll want to stop.

Sometimes even the most obvious misstep can't be avoided simply because people hate giving up on an idea once they've committed to it. That's where doing the math becomes the bright light that makes it clear if you'll make it or not as new homeowners.

Time to make a new budget incorporating all the costs associated with owning a home, and adjusting the amount you'll spend elsewhere to compensate for higher shelter costs.

Add up the mortgage payment, property taxes, condo fees, utilities and insurance. Don't forget to budget between about two per cent (in cities) to four per cent (in the country) of the value of your home for home maintenance every year to keep a house in reasonable shape.

If you have an older home that needs work, you should use the higher number.

Subtract the amount you're currently spending to keep a roof over your head.

The difference — the increase in your shelter costs — has to come from somewhere, so what are you not going to spend money on to have that home of your dreams? Will you give up daily coffee, lunch out, that winter vacation you so look forward to?

Something's gotta give, and here's where you decide what that something (or those somethings) will be.

When you work out how much you'll need in your budget you'll probably choke.

Once you get over your sputtering, know that since your home is likely to be your biggest financial asset, you better take good care of it. From lawn care to repainting every few years, from a new furnace to replacing the roof, home ownership is an expensive business.

If you aren't up for the responsibility, renting is always an option.

For more money advice, visit Gail's website at gailvazoxlade.com

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The first step to establishing rapport with someone is awareness. Be mindful of body language, breathing mood, and try to play off that, advises life coach Niurka. ISTOCK

The skill you need to get what you want

ADVICE

The key to negotiating with and influencing people? Rapport

Raquel Laneri
Metro | New York

One of the most popular self-help books ever written is called How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie, and, frankly, it's no wonder: Who doesn't want to will others into doing what one wants, whether through one's presence, words or sheer charisma?

Well, life coach Niurka — yes, just Niurka, like Madonna and Cher — says the key to such persuasiveness, and to one's empowerment, is communication, and there's one very important component to that: rapport.

"Rapport is essential in all negotiations, because when there's rapport the decision-maker will want to work with you, even if you're not saying the perfect thing," says Niurka, whose new book is Supreme Influence: Change Your Life with the Power of the Language You Use. But creating rapport is a subtle art: you can't exactly fake affinity, or chemistry. We asked the expert for her advice on establishing that kind of connection.

Be aware

The first step to establishing rapport is awareness: after all, you have to be self-aware enough to know when you aren't establishing a rapport with someone, or when you lose it. "Oftentimes people communicate too soon," she says. "They're so in tune with what they want to say rather than being totally present with the person and the situation." Notice your target's body language, her breathing, her mood, and try to play off that.

Care about the bigger picture

When talking to a boss or supervisor, don't make it about you, you, you. "You have to authentically care about the bigger picture, not just your agenda," advises Niurka. "Before you go in ask yourself not just 'What do I want?' or 'How can I get what I want in this conversation?' but 'What's important to this person, to this company as a whole?'"

Ask questions

One important — and easy — way to establish rapport and show that you genuinely care about the other person's needs and concerns is to ask questions. "Say: 'I'm curious about what's working, or what isn't working,' in terms of a particular context — or, 'If you can change one thing in this department what would it be?'" suggests Niurka. "You want someone to get passionate and then connect on that point of passion: you don't want to be the one who's passionate and trying to sell them on it. You want them to have a buy-in."

One more thing ...

"When you're going to an important meeting — whether it's one-on-one with your boss or giving a big presentation to a group of people — be clear on your intention, without attachment to outcome," says Niurka. "You don't want to get tunnel vision, so you've got to be clear what is the essence of what it is that you're inspired to create or achieve and then be open to all the different ways you can make that a reality."

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Christmas is in the mail

Oh Clark Griswold. Unlike the hero of National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, there is no need to settle for the Jelly of the Month club. Instead this season, try some of these decidedly more appealing box-of-the-month deals.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

BarkBox

Cost: $29 per month for one month, up to $228 for 12 months, with $5 extra shipping charge to send boxes to Canada.

What's inside: Surprise Fido monthly with this box of pup-approved treats, chews, and toys to get their tails wagging. Pick a box based on your dog's size.

How it started: Founders Carly Strife, Matt Meeker and Henrik Werdelin had a hard time finding products they liked at their local pet stores for their pups. "So they decided to put together a box that would surprise and delight and give the dogs a piece of mail every month," says Alexis Anderson, BarkBox's head of partnerships.

Website: barkbox.com

Spicy subscriptions

Cost: Boxes range from $14.95 for a single product/monthly to $250 for a year. Shipping to Canada is an extra $6.50.

What's inside: From lubes, lotions and oils to toys and accessories, this sexy subscription is sure to surprise. Oh and yes, the company ships discreetly.

How it got started: Adi and his girlfriend had started dating and wanted to explore some intimate items — only it was a bit intimidating for his partner. That's when he realized it probably wasn't just her who felt like that.

Website: spicysubscriptions.com

Office grocery

Cost: From $45 to $130.

What's inside: Weekly, biweekly or monthly boxes have subscribers choosing fruit, bulk snacks, trail mixes and mixed bars.

How it got started: Rory Stavro-Pearce already knew the business — after all, he'd been running a healthy vending machine company, Organic Vending for almost seven years.

Website: officegrocery.com

Panty by post

Cost: From $45 to $380 depending on the line of briefs you choose.

What's inside: Underwear by mail? You bet — choose from the basic, signature (the site's most popular panties) or premium lines to surprise the man or woman in your life monthly with a new set of undies.

How it got started: An appreciator of all things French, Vancouver-based Natalie Grunberg wanted to share that "Frenchness" with others. "I wanted to deliver something that was little because of shipping rates, that was something everything needs and that was French," she says. She spends part of her summers in the Riviera.

Website: pantybypost.com

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Flavour of cookies in a delicious cake

SPICE SEASON

Dessert brings out the best of gingerbread

Jennifer Friesen

For the past four years, Vincci Tsui and her sister, Winkie, have taken over the kitchen with candies, icing, gingerbread batter and cookie cutters (along with a rogue lion or crocodile cookie cutter).

It became their holiday tradition, and they haven't looked back since.

"Personally, I've always really liked spiced things," she said. "I love gingerbread, I love chai, I love mulled apple cider. I'm not much of a fan of candy cane or eggnog for Christmas — so, at Christmas, it has to be gingerbread for me."

But it was always the flavour that drew her in, never the cookies or the candies. So Tsui scoured the web in search of a way to make gingerbread more like gingerbread.

After a few tries of looking for something easy to make, but still packed with the gingerbread flavour, she landed on her gingerbread cake.

"What's nice about this cake is that it's utilitarian," Tsui said. "You can make it fancy and bring it as a cake, or you can just pour the batter into a loaf pan and make a gingerbread loaf, and you can even just have a slice with butter for breakfast."

The molasses-filled cake has always been the perfect way to curb the taste buds.

"Gingerbread has always been a big thing for me," Tsui said. "And it's always fun to hang out with my sister and do something so it actually feels like Christmas."

VINCCI'S TIPS

1. "When measuring the water and molasses, measure the molasses first so the water draws out the rest of the molasses."
2. "Spices should only be sitting in your cabinet for a maximum of a year. So use fresh spices, because those are the star of this dish."
3. "Decorate it however you want ... Use custard or maple butter or salted caramel."

Vincci Tsui has always loved gingerbread, and her gingerbread cake is the perfect way to bring the flavour and spice to a new dessert. JENNIFER FRIESEN

GINGERBREAD CAKE

INGREDIENTS

½ cup butter
⅔ cup brown sugar, packed
1 egg
1 cup molasses
1½ cups all-purpose flour
1 cup whole wheat flour
1½ tsp baking soda
1 tsp ground ginger
1 tsp cinnamon
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp nutmeg
¼ tsp cloves
1 cup hot (not boiling) water

DIRECTIONS

1. Grease a 9" round cake pan and preheat the oven to 350F.
2. Cream butter and sugar together. Add egg and beat until light and fluffy. Add the molasses and mix until blended.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients. Add a heaping ½ cup to the batter, then a ¼ cup of hot water, alternating between the two. Beat until smooth after each addition. Pour into prepared pan.
4. Bake for 45-50 minutes, or until a tester comes out clean.

The Cincinnati Bengals were hit hard Sunday — they were beaten 33-20 by Pittsburgh and lost quarterback Andy Dalton to a broken thumb

Virtanen welcomed back

WORLD JUNIORS

Canada makes cuts as former Hitman added to roster

Canada's junior team made four cuts on Sunday — and one important addition.

The Vancouver Canucks gave forward Jake Virtanen permission to join Canada's national junior team, a little over an hour after Hockey Canada completed its first round of cuts to its selection camp roster.

Forwards Pierre-Luc Dubois, Michael Dal Colle and Spencer Watson were cut from the team along with defenceman Jakob Chychrun.

Virtanen, a former Calgary Hitmen star, is one of four players returning from last year's gold medal-winning team, joining forwards Brayden Point and Lawson Crouse as well as defenceman Joe Hicketts. He's the only member of Canada's junior team with regular-season experience in the NHL.

"He brings a power-forward element," said Hicketts in the lobby of the team's hotel in suburban Toronto. "He's a big, strong, smooth skater who can shoot the puck well. Anytime you can get a player of that calibre back it helps the lineup."

Virtanen was in downtown Toronto playing with the American Hockey League's Utica Comets, who he'd been assigned to on a conditioning stint, and will join Canada immediately. The team will leave for Imatra, Finland, late Monday for practices and exhibition games before the world championship tournament begins in Helsinki on Dec. 26.

Jake Virtanen, right, has 19 games of NHL experience with the Vancouver Canucks. NATHAN DENETTE/THE CANADIAN PRESS

The 19-year-old right-winger from New Westminster, B.C., and fellow rookie Jared McCann both made the Canucks roster on Nov. 1, passing their nine-game tryout period. He has a goal and three assists in 19 games with Vancouver and has no points in two games with Utica.

> **We have some decisions that we still think need more time and we're prepared to do that.**
> Head coach Dave Lowry

"He brings size, skill and a heavy shot," said Point. "He's a physical player, so he brings it all for our team."

The cuts came after the second of two exhibition games between Canada and a team of all-stars from Canadian universities. Canada's junior team now has 15 forwards, nine defencemen and three goaltenders with more cuts to come when the team is in Europe.

Samuel Montembeault made 33 saves as Canada shut out the Canadian Interuniversity Sport team 5-0 on Sunday afternoon to conclude Canada's junior selection camp.

Anthony Beauvillier led Canada with a hat trick while Dubois and Travis Konecny also scored.

Canada lost to the CIS all-stars 5-4 in a shootout on Saturday night. THE CANADIAN PRESS

NBA

Warriors in search of normalcy after historic start

Every victory raised the stakes for the Golden State Warriors.

Now that their record winning streak is over, the defending NBA champions can return to a bit of normalcy.

"I just told the guys that now we can have a regular season," forward Draymond Green said in recounting his talk to teammates after Saturday night's loss to the Bucks in Milwaukee.

Golden State's NBA-record start ended after 24 games with the 108-95 loss. The Warriors had a 28-game regular-season winning streak going back to last spring, five short of the NBA record 33-game run by the Los Angeles Lakers in 1971-72.

72-10

Led by reigning MVP Stephen Curry the 24-1 Warriors will continue to draw hype as they chase the Chicago Bulls' 72-10 record from 1995-96 — the best regular-season finish in NBA history.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Attention on the Warriors and their likable cast of characters, led by MVP sharpshooter Stephen Curry, grew as the wins piled up.

But the streak crumbled on Saturday at the end of a seven-game road trip, less than 24 hours after Golden State needed two overtimes to win in Boston.

"We looked like we ran out of gas a little bit," Warriors interim coach Luke Walton said.

His team, which normally makes 13 threes a game, was 6-for-26 from behind the arc.

Most Warriors said they didn't feel any added pressure during the run. But it did seem as though Golden State was playing in the NBA Finals every time it hit the floor.

"It has been kind of a playoff feel just with the streak and all the media and attention around," Green said. "I think probably the last seven or eight games we stopped getting better and just tried to win the game."

Guard Shaun Livingston said the streak made the Warriors' season different.

"It has been mentally taxing, just every game. We're competitors, so we're not complaining about it. It is fun to play that way," Livingston said. "I think now we can settle in more to the season." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Blackhawks' Kane ups point streak to 26 games

Patrick Kane extended his points streak to 26 games, Corey Crawford made 30 saves for his second straight shutout, and the Chicago Blackhawks beat the Vancouver Canucks 4-0 on Sunday night.

Kane, the NHL's leading scorer with 46 points, had the second assist on Duncan Keith's power-play goal midway through the first.

Dennis Rasmussen, Andrew Shaw and Brandon Mashinter also scored for the Blackhawks, winners of four of five.

Kane surpassed Sidney Crosby's 25-game streak, set in 2010-11, for the longest in the league since 1992-93. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Homan outsweeps Jones to win Canadian Open

Ottawa's Rachel Homan scored a pair in the final end for an 8-7 victory over Winnipeg's Jennifer Jones in Sunday's final at the Canadian Open.

Rachel Homan
CURLING CANADA

It was the third straight Grand Slam victory for Homan, who won the Masters and the National earlier this season.

Toronto's John Epping defeated Brad Gushue of St. John's 7-4 in the men's final. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Raptors deep-six 76ers

DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points and grabbed eight rebounds to lift the Toronto Raptors 96-76 over the lowly Philadelphia 76ers on Sunday.

Luis Scola added 22 points, while Kyle Lowry scored 16 for the Raptors (16-9), who ended their six-game homestand with four straight wins after opening with a pair of losses. The Raptors have now won 10 straight over Philadelphia,

Jahlil Okafor led the Sixers (1-24) with 23 points, while Robert Covington had 15 and Isaiah Canaan finished with 10.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

UFC

McGregor ends Aldo's reign in seconds

Gab is just one of Conor McGregor's many gifts.

The Irish star possesses a punching power that has made him an undisputed world champion in just seven UFC fights. McGregor also has an uncanny ability to predict not only the outcome of a fight, but the manner in which he'll accomplish his next feat of pugilistic prowess.

McGregor called his shot well before his featherweight title bout with Jose Aldo at UFC 194, vowing he wouldn't need a full round to stop a champion who hadn't lost in 10 years. And then he delivered that shot to Aldo's jaw to end the fight in just 13 seconds — a little quicker than even he expected.

13

Number of seconds it took McGregor to knock out Aldo

For as much as McGregor talks, he was sure to get some predictions right. Yet when asked to foresee his own future after he ended Aldo's 18-fight winning streak, McGregor wasn't quite ready. "I'll give it some time," McGregor said Saturday.

Indeed, McGregor reigns atop the featherweight division and the sport after a remarkable 2015. He won three fights, made untold millions and raised his fame near the heights reached by Ronda Rousey, who will be featured alongside him on the cover of EA Sports' new UFC video game.

"I think I am the pound-for-pound No. 1," McGregor said. And McGregor predicts next year will be even bigger. The Dublin native's next fight will be a title bout at either featherweight or lightweight. He also vowed that he won't give up his 145-pound belt, instead planning to become a two-division champion.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cam Newton has already thrown a career-high 28 TD passes — with three games left to play. BOB LEVERONE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

New level of perfection

NFL

Panthers's rout enhances their dominance to improve to 13-0

SUNDAY In Charlotte

38	0
PANTHERS	FALCONS

Cam Newton raced from one end of the Carolina Panthers' sideline to the other in the final moments of a 38-0 rout of the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday, raising his arms to the crowd as fans cheered on their emotional MVP candidate.

"I believe right now it's our moment as Panthers," Newton said with a smile. "We try to seize it as much as possible."

Newton — and the fans — had plenty of reason to celebrate.

The fifth-year quarterback completed 15 of 21 passes for 265 yards and three touchdowns, and the unbeaten Panthers clinched a first-round bye in the NFC playoffs in what Newton described as the team's most complete game.

It's hard to argue that.

The Panthers out-gained the Falcons 424-230, forced four turnovers and matched the franchise's largest margin of victory.

It was never close.

Jonathan Stewart ran for a one-yard TD and Newton connected on scoring strikes of 74 and 46 yards to Ted Ginn Jr. as the Panthers (13-0) scored on their first three possessions to take a 21-0 first quarter lead.

Newton also threw a four-yard TD pass to Ed Dickson in the final seconds of the first half before leaving for good at the end of the third quarter with Carolina up 38. He finished with a career-high QB rating of 153.3.

"Don't ease up on the gas," Newton said. "We want to be considered finishers."

Carolina's defence had two interceptions, two fumble recoveries and registered five sacks — two by defensive tackle Kawann Short — while limiting struggling Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan to 224 yards passing.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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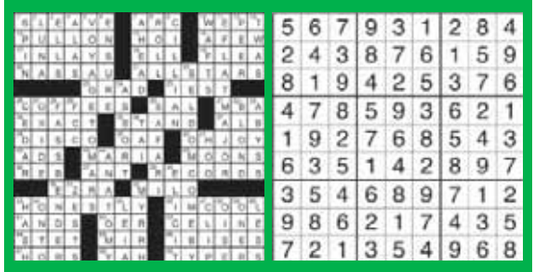

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for more fun and games go to metronews.ca/games

RECIPE Spicy Beef Tacos

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

These easy tacos get a zing of heat from chili but a warmth from cumin and cinnamon.

Ready in
Prep time: 30 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1 large sweet potato, diced into bite-size pieces
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 1/2 tsp salt, divided
- 1 lb organic lean ground beef
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp dried oregano
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 1/4 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup shaved Monterey Jack cheese
- A handful of chopped fresh cilantro
- Salsa
- 8 corn tortillas, warmed according to package directions

Directions
1. Preheat oven to 400 F.
2. In a bowl, toss sweet potato with olive oil and 1/2 tsp salt. Spread sweet potato pieces out in a single layer on a lined baking sheet. Bake in the oven for 5 to 7 minutes. Toss and then bake another 3 to 5 minutes, or until fork tender. Remove potatoes from oven and place in a bowl.
3. In a large skillet, cook beef over medium heat until browned, about 10 minutes.
4. In a small bowl, blend chili powder, cumin, cinnamon and dried oregano. Stir into the meat the garlic, spice blend, pepper and remaining salt; cook for another 2 minutes. Remove beef from heat and transfer to serving dish.
5. Place beef, sweet potato, slices of red onion, cheese, fresh cilantro, salsa and tortillas out on the table for taco assembly. Enjoy.

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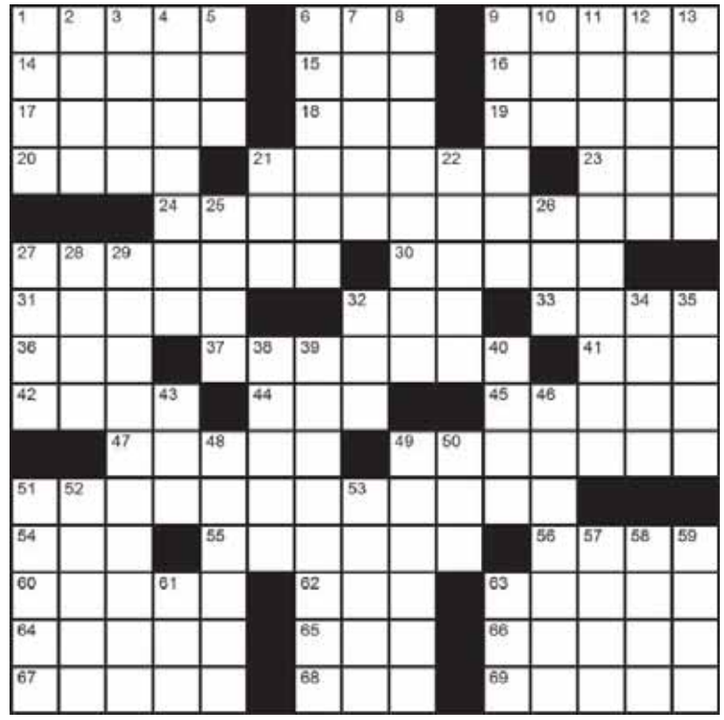
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. Possessed, in ye olden days
6. Winter roads worry
9. Country legend Johnny's
14. Join
15. Ho! Ho! Ho! X-__ (Dec. 25th)
16. Tear that paper: 2 wds.
17. Concluded
18. Kitty's rival
19. Irish rebel Rory
20. Momentarily
21. __ mustache (Sported by Sherlock Holmes creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)
23. "Whistle __ the Lave O't": Song by Scottish poet Robert Burns
24. Holiday candies by #49-Down celebrating their 130th anniversary: 2 wds.
27. Noncompliant
30. Flair
31. Lagoon-in-the-middle island
32. "__ recall..."
33. Stroller, to a Brit
36. Neither's partner
37. Appetizer served with plum sauce: 2 wds.
41. Pasta names suffix
42. 'Within'-meaning prefix
44. Swiss peak
45. Mr. Williams of "Happy Days"
47. Animal of The Andes
49. Doorkeeper
51. What people do when they sign into their e-mail accounts: 2 wds.
54. Bit of food
55. Of bears
56. 'Demo' suffix (Politician sort)
60. Get __ (Score in hockey)
62. "How was __ know?"
63. The Congo's former name
64. "Irma la __" (1963)
65. Grandma
66. Stick on
67. Fashion show walk
68. Unit of work
69. Bug: 2 wds.

DOWN
1. Shades
2. __ Domini (AD)
3. "Thank You" singer
4. Sheet that when painted over reveals a design beneath
5. Bill's bogus buddy
6. Influential effect
7. Shower sealant
8. Starbucks serving
9. Surname of one of Neil Young's bandmates
10. Purpose
11. Cutlery user's slip of the tongue?
12. Just-got-the-job person
13. 'Trick' suffixes
21. Get the glory
22. Up to a certain time
25. Fit, fiddle-style
26. "Superman's Dead" rock gr. from Toronto
27. Stand-up comedian Mr. Cook
28. Collar type
29. Archaeology in New Brunswick... Historic trading post in Saint John: 2 wds.
32. Dadaist Jean
34. Kind of buffalo
35. Duluth's state, for short
38. Nintendo enthusiast
39. Translucent envelope material for storing stamps
40. Tardy
43. Previous
46. Instant coffee brand
48. Protector-from-harm charm
49. Family-owned New Brunswick chocolatier since 1873
50. Bronze __
51. Map's lines, often
52. Grain fungus
53. Ravi Shankar's instrument
57. Fissure
58. Opera offering
59. Communicate, techie-style
61. Prefix with 'puncture'
63. 'Zig' add-on

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
Watch your back and think twice before giving anyone the benefit of the doubt. The Sun may be moving through your fellow Fire sign of Sagittarius but so is Saturn, planet of limitation, and that means someone may be working against you.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
You may not want to but it's time to give up on a goal that requires the kind of cash you no longer have. Let it go and next time aim for something cheaper.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You will get conflicting advice but you know what must be done, so do it. Trust your instincts and hope for the best. The best will happen.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You may be tempted to call the bluff of those you are negotiating with and hold out for a better offer but the planets warn that is not a good idea. You would be wise to seal the deal on the terms being offered.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Your confidence could slump as Saturn makes it easy to see nothing but grey skies. Your problems may be all in the mind but if you believe bad things are going to happen then they most likely will.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Someone is refusing to see sense. You tried to point them in the right direction, so if they make a mess of things it's their own fault.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Some people may say that you're losing your edge, that you are not as decisive and dynamic as you used to be, but it isn't true. Even a Libra is entitled to relax once in a while.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Try not to appear too eager today. If you can give others, especially rivals, the impression that you don't care whether you win or lose you'll lull them into a false sense of security.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
You can't change past failures, so there is no point in dwelling on them. However, while the Sun is in your sign you can have a few successes, so stop being negative and start doing things that get you noticed.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
Something is bothering you and your rivals and enemies are beginning to pick up on your fear. Don't worry about whether you are moving in the right direction because all roads lead to the same destination.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
If you try to live up to other people's image of you then you are likely to exhaust yourself for no good reason. Your health should be your main concern.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
If someone in a position of authority asks you to do something of a questionable nature today you must turn them down flat. Principle comes before power.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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